

Delegation of France

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR ERIC LEBEDEL,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF FRANCE, AT THE OSCE
CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND
PROMOTING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING**

**Follow-up to the Cordoba Conference on Anti-Semitism
and Other Forms of Intolerance**

Bucharest, 7 and 8 June 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to add a few words, for my own country, to the statement made on behalf of the European Union, to which I fully subscribe, particularly in expressing our gratitude to the Spanish Chairmanship and to Romania for organizing and hosting this conference.

A country of great diversity, France is proud of its basic principles of liberty, equality and fraternity, which mean that respect for human rights and dignity is at the heart of the republican project.

In spite of its long tradition of openness and tolerance, France has not been spared from the persistence of, and indeed an increase in, racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic acts — three types of phenomenon that are distinct but must be combated together, all three with equal energy.

The French Government is totally resolved to combat this threat to democracy and national cohesion.

Its commitment has been reflected, in recent years, in a significant strengthening of our means for combating racism, anti-Semitism and all forms of discrimination, including those based on sex or sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age or disability.

At the institutional level, we have set up a co-ordinating body attached to the Prime Minister's office, the Inter-Ministerial Committee to Combat Racism and Anti-Semitism, together with a High-Level Authority for Combating Discrimination and Promoting Equality.

Since the Law of 13 July 1990, “revisionism” is no longer treated as the expression of an opinion but represents the criminal offence of questioning the existence of crimes against humanity.

On two occasions, in 2003 and 2004, we have strengthened our legislation concerning the prosecution of offences of a racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic nature.

We have developed partnerships with Internet service providers to counter the dissemination on the Internet of racist, anti-Semitic and xenophobic material. I would recall our involvement in this question within the OSCE context evidenced by the organization of the 2004 Paris Meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and Anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes.

With regard to prevention, the national education system has taken action to combat prejudices and promote our republican values. In particular, a mechanism has been set up for detecting and dealing with racist and anti-Semitic acts in the school environment.

I shall have an opportunity to return to these various points during our debates.

Mr. Chairman,

In keeping with its national priorities, France has been actively supporting OSCE activities concerned with promoting tolerance and combating discrimination. Since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, the participating States have adopted an important set of commitments whose implementation needs to be improved.

In this connection, I should like to reaffirm the attachment of France to the role of the three personal representatives of the Chairman-in-Office, who perform a function that is indispensable for the political visibility of the OSCE’s efforts, contributing to vigilance and monitoring and serving as supporting links in the promotion and follow-up of the commitments entered into by participating States.

I also wish to reaffirm the support of France for the essential assistance provided to participating States by the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) through its Programme on Tolerance and Non-discrimination. Its activities in the areas of developing the capacities of civil society and combating hate crimes are priorities which particularly merit our endorsement.

On this last point, we are convinced that the training of the police and gendarmerie in the identification and combating of this type of crime is an indispensable factor. It is for that reason that, last December, we organized a training seminar for police officers from the OSCE area in Paris in co-operation with the ODIHR. This is a new initiative. We hope that other participating States will follow suit and host similar training sessions.

In conclusion, I should like to make two recommendations. They concern the reinforcement of the implementation of commitments:

- The first recommendation would be to pay more attention to the role of local authorities in combating discrimination. It is they who are in the front line in the battle against the day-to-day reality of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

- The second would be to organize an exchange of information on good practices regarding national bodies for combating discrimination — a tool introduced by several participating States to enhance the monitoring of discriminatory phenomena and improve assistance for their victims.

Thank you for your attention.